

NEWS ARTICLE

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EXTENSION FOOD TALK

5 Traps To Avoid When Eating Out

Question: In the past week, how many times have you eaten a meal at a restaurant or cafeteria? According to the National Restaurant Association, almost half of all adults were restaurant patrons on a typical day during 1998.

Eating away from home is challenging for health-conscious consumers. If it's a special occasion, go ahead and splurge on a rich dish or dessert. But at the rate Americans eat out, we can't afford to overindulge each time.

Take time to find the healthier items at your favorite eating places. Watch out for these common eating out mistakes:

1. Baked is Better...Right?!

Congratulations! You chose a baked potato instead of French fries. It took a lot of will power to order the healthier baked spud, especially when everyone else you are dining with ordered the fried version. But to be truly healthier than the fries, be sure the traditional potato toppers don't add fat and calories you were bypassing in the first place. For example, the typical baked potato with sour cream and chives packs in 24 grams of fat. One with cheese and broccoli weighs in a bit lower at 16 fat grams.

2. No Such Thing as Free Chips or Bread

Most restaurants greet you with bread or even fried tortilla chips as soon as you sit down. A basket of bread contains around 400 to 1000 calories while a basket of chips contains 700-900 calories. Would you pass around a bag of chips or basket of bread before dinner at home? Take a handful of chips or slice of bread then ask your server to remove the basket from the table.

3. "I Only Ate a Salad"

Salads are usually touted as healthy on restaurant menus, but smart diners know what to look for. Obviously, one topped with fried chicken tenders or high fat meats, cheese, eggs,

croutons, and bacon bits isn't a good choice. Neither is one with dressing already added. Choose a salad that goes heavy on dark greens and other vegetables, light on lean meats and cheese, and always order the dressing on the side (dip your fork into it before each bite and you'll use less).

4. Bigger is Better, and Cheaper

Fast food restaurants want you to think bigger is better, and cheaper too. For only pennies more, you can "upgrade" to a larger size of sandwich, French fries and soft drink. Don't fall for it. You only end up paying less for more fat, more calories, and ultimately more weight and health problems. Going from small to super size fried can add 16 fat grams to your meal. A quarter pounder with cheese has 17 more fat grams than a small cheeseburger.

5. Mom Always Said to "Eat Your Vegetables"

You hear it all the time...eat at least three servings of vegetables daily. They're packed with vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, and fiber. But veggies prepared away from home may give you more fat than you expect. Ask how they are prepared. In butter? Cream sauce? Some menus use hearts or other symbols to designate lighter entrees and side dishes.

Predictions for 2000 call for consumers to spend more than \$1 billion on food prepared away from home every day. You can spend your share of that wisely by recognizing that eating out can't be an occasion to splurge every time, and that you can make smart, healthful choices.

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